Max Horkheimer and Environmental History.

A Case for the Greater Kowie Region (Eastern Cape, South Africa)

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1. Introduction

The aims and objectives of the Lower Albany Historical Society[1] provide a pleasant opportunity to contribute to the environmental history of the greater Kowie region and its environs – be it from a (much needed and simplified) philosophical perspective.[2]

South Africa's environmental history cannot be separated from such concepts as e.g. domination and resistance. In fact, domination and resistance characterise South African history from the first days since the arrival of Van Riebeeck in 1652 at the Cape. Today, when viewed from a regional perspective, the South African government's continued role in expansive and hegemonic regional political (and other) practices (as was the case from the mid-1650s at the Cape) in the post–apartheid era, requires the questioning of the legacy of traditional historiographical interpretations since some of the above raise relevant concerns for environmental historians. To take one example: the geo-political continuance of continental and supra-regional neo-domination is fundamental to new historical interpretive perspectives in general, but to the environmental history of the greater Kowie region, in particular.[3]

No historical (or for that matter any) study of the environment takes place in a philosophical (intellectual) vacuum. New investigations regarding different approaches to the study of environmental history will unsettle traditional convictions. For our purpose below, three unqualified observations will have to suffice. Firstly, the popular view that the "poor and the powerless are the most affected by environmental degradation,"[4] will no longer withstand closer scrutiny. Similarly, multi-corporations can no longer be seen as the prime movers of environmental destruction.[5] One recent example should make the point. The destruction of vineyards during mid-November 2012 on Western Cape farms by disgruntled farmworkers regarding their minimum wage levels, highlights these (and many other) realities – including forms of reverse domination in modern South African

[1] See for instance [Editor] (sic). "The Aims and Objectives of the Lower Albany Historical Society: A Reminder", in *Toposcope,* Vol. XXX, 1999, p.50.

[2] A classic example in this regards, would be to research and write the micro environmental history of the recent floods of mid-October 2012, in Port Alfred and its environs. By making use of oral tradition for instance, the history of the experiences of rural peoples in the periphery of urban towns most affected by these floods, are not exclusive to the environmental history of the Kowie in specific, but also the Zuurveld in general.

[3] The proposed South African government sponsored fracking in the ecologically sensitive Karoo in search of natural gas is a case in point – based on traditional and outdated rationale for doing so.

[4] Cock, J. *The War Against Ourselves. Nature, Power and Justice*, p.201.

[5] *Ibid*., p.203.

society. This also implies that environmental destruction vests at the individual level. Lastly, the rethinking of both concepts nature[6] and environment is overdue. As a result, the new juridico-epistemological frameworks that early Critical Theory alluded to, found their way onto contemporary agendas regarding environmental philosophy. The growing body of environmental history literature necessitates the need to ensure that we do not fall behind in the critique of modern environmental debates. A detailed look at international trends supports the view regarding the important role of local historical societies in the above. A secondary purpose of the seemingly long bibliography is to introduce some literature and to stimulate further reading. As a result this study was undertaken for these (and other) reasons.

The limited purpose of this short paper is to comment on the German social philosopher, Max Horkheimer's (1895-1973) thinking about humankind's natural environment.[7] We consider his views relevant for the environmental history of the Eastern Cape – to be more specific, it is applicable to the environmental history of the greater Kowie region. The restricted scope of this research would therefore not require a general overview of the current status of environmental history in Southern Africa because it would duplicate previous investigations[8] and will probably add nothing new to existing knowledge.

In fairness to the first generation critical theorists, one needs to point out that the early founders (and associated members) of the Institute for Social Research (at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt – est. in 1914) did not anticipate the environmental crises that the world faces today. Naturally, the first members of the Frankfurt School did not provide, nor did they intend to, give us final answers on environmental issues. In any case, neither historians nor philosophers (should) make such clams. In retrospect (and as side comment), one can argue that the destruction of the natural environment by the world's warring nations during 1914-1918 (and of course thereafter), would stimulate interesting themes for study by environmental historians. But this is for course, at the mega-level of analysis.

Max Horkheimer (as a founder member of the Institute – est. in 1923) was in the first instance a philosopher – he did not write environmental history *per se* – he had, of course, views about nature (the environment) and it is in those, that we are interested in this paper. The nature of this investigation is exploratory, and the scope, an attempt to apply only one aspect of Horkheimer's thinking to the environmental history of the Kowie. Consequently, our focus in this paper is confined to Chapter 3 - "The Revolt of Nature" in Horkheimer's book, *Eclipse of Reason.* The basis for our brief discussion therefore rests on the analysis of one of his public lectures - "The Revolt of Nature" – which formed part of a series entitled "Society and Reason." Horkheimer delivered these lecture at Columbia University during February and March 1944[9] and were only published in 1947. By this time, Horkheimer (and others) considered to return to Frankfurt from exile in the USA.

As far back as at least two decades *before* the advent of revisionist Marxist historiography in the late 1960s in South Africa – from which, it was claimed, South Africa's environmental history

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[6] *Ibid*., p.200.

[7] For a comprehensive list of Horkheimer's publications in German and English, see Benhabid, S., W. Bonß, and J. McCole (eds). *On Horkheimer. New Perspectives,* pp.413-419. For a comprehensive history of the Frankfurt School, see Jay, M. *The Dialectical Imagination. A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-1950.* For a comprehensive study of Max Horkheimer's role as director of the Institute for Social Research, see Abromeit, J. *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School*.

[8] Steyn, P. "The Greening of Our Past? An Assessment of South African Environmental Historiography", in *New Contree,* Vol. 46, November 1999; Carruthers, J. "Environmental History in Southern Africa: An Overview", in Dover, S., R. Edgecombe and B. Guest (eds). *South Africa's Environmental History. Cases & Comparisons*, pp.3-15.

[9] Horkheimer, M. "Preface", in Horkheimer, M. *Eclipse of Reason*, p.(v).

developed in the 1980s,[10] did Horkheimer's Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School already develop some *philosophical* principles, which we argue, can be fruitfully employed for the study of the environmental history of the Kowie and its environs.

To place Horkheimer's early Critical Theory in context, a few cryptic remarks about his aims and objectives will have to suffice. There are two reasons for this: firstly, the world in which he lived changed dramatically, and secondly, it is not surprising that Horkheimer's perspectives changed profoundly during his lifetime.[11] For ease of clarity, the specific themes in "Revolt of Nature" which Horkheimer covered in his discussion of civilization's self-perpetuating continuance of dominance, can be thematically summarized as follows: man's domination for self-preservation; the internalization of domination through the human ego; the reversal of the process of domination; the reality of mimetic impulses, and lastly, the relevance of Darwinism relative to enlightenment and the domination of nature.[12]

2. What was Critical Theory for Horkheimer?

When Horkheimer was appointed as professor of social philosophy that Frankfurt in 1930, he also officially became the director of the Institute for Social Research. As was customary when appointed to a university chair, it was required, and therefore he delivered, his inaugural lecture on 24th January 1931 entitled "The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Task of an Institute for Social Research."[13] This lecture became the framework for the Institute's future research programme and can also be considered as the Institute's first broad strategic plan. In addition, his paper "Traditional and Critical Theory"[14] (published in 1937) is today regarded as the most fundamental early outline of what would later generally become known as Critical Theory.

At first, the Institute's work took place largely within the Hegelian/Marxist tradition. This meant that the practical objectives of identifying, and then overcoming, those circumstances that prohibit human freedom, also envisaged the transformation of capitalist society into a more democratic civic.[15] By this time, the principle that all human production is a form of competition and human appropriation of nature to the extent that such established new relations with nature, were well entrenched in early Marxist literature.[16]

The overall project of early Critical Theory was to develop an empirically and historically entrenched research program that was fundamentally interdisciplinary in nature. The research involved sociologists, philosophers, economists, historians and psychologists. The intent was to overcome the shortcomings of existing Marxist theories (or interpretations) of historical and social development. Such undertakings by the Institute intended a move away from previous abstract philosophical debates (mainly Hegelian idealist) in Germany. Horkheimer wanted the Institute to bring together under one roof, the different conceptual tools and social-scientific methodologies of historical materialism. In a sense, the days of narrative interpretations of history which condensed the course of history to be the sum total of individual events and facts, were over. It did so without sacrificing empirical foundations.

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[10] Carruthers, J. "Environmental History in Southern Africa: An Overview", in Dovers, S., R. Edgecombe and B. Guest (eds). *South Africa's Environmental History. Cases & Comparisons*, p.4.
[11] See for instance Horkheimer's "Preface", in Horkheimer, M. *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*, pp.(v) – (x).
[12] Horkheimer, M. *Eclipse of Reason*, p.65.
[13] See Horkheimer, M. *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, pp.1-14.
[14] Horkheimer, M. "Traditional and Critical Theory", in Horkheimer, M. *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*, pp.188-252.
[15] Bohman, J. "Critical Theory", in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, p.2.
[16] Marx, K. (with F. Engels). *The German Ideology*, pp.5, 7.

A closer look at Horkheimer's inaugural lecture highlights a few important points and contextualizes his subsequent writings. Firstly, at the outset of his lecture, Horkheimer explained that the traditional (or existing) disciplinary boundaries were under scrutiny to such extent that it represented an intellectual crisis in the Weimar Republic. In other words, the current intellectual situation needed to re-evaluate the position also of present social philosophy. The ultimate aim, Horkheimer said, of social philosophy, should be to analyse and interpret all forms of human fate. This interpretation must focus on humans not only as individuals, but rather as members of a larger community. This meant that social philosophy must understand the full context of human life, e.g. the state, law, economy and religion – in short, the entire material and intellectual culture of humanity[17] needed to be taken into consideration. Our view is that this opens the opportunity for the inclusion and application of Critical Theory to environmental history.

Secondly, the above approach meant a move away from the standard versions of social philosophy. It questioned logical positivism's mere factual focus[18] and assigned to future social philosophy, social functions.[19] For example, social philosophy would address some of the oldest and most important philosophical problems, *viz.* the connection between economic life of society; the physical development of individuals; and the changes in the cultural sphere.[20]

In the final part of his lecture, Horkheimer dealt (although briefly by his own admission) with the practical execution and the envisaged implementation of his ideas for the Institute. He advocated that it was important to study the published statistics available of organisations, political associations, and public agencies that related "to the skilled craftspeople and white collar workers in Germany."[21] This would take place in the economic, sociological and psychological fields of study through the use of the most varied methods of scientific investigation. For instance, with the help of specialists, questionnaires that reflected connections to real life concerns would be used to gain information. Apart from empirical research programs, the Institute would appoint permanent members to do so; evaluate documents not yet in book form; open a branch office in Geneva, and fulfil teaching responsibilities[22] in conjunction with the university. Years later, after his return from exile in America, Horkheimer reflected fondly on his university teaching years.

At this point of our discussion it is important to note that Horkheimer came from a well-to-do family and that he had first–hand experience of the manufacturing industrial culture as a result of having worked in his father's business and elsewhere. Here he came in contact with the conditions of the factory workers and their plight. Secondly, Horkheimer experienced two World Wars and was well aware of the conditions of the atrocities of both. It is therefore not surprising that *Eclipse of Reason*, Lohmann wrote, represented Horkheimer's main writings "of disillusioned self-criticism in second phase critical theory."[23] The years between these public lectures (Feb/March 1944) and March 1946 when he wrote the "Preface" to *Eclipse of Reason*, were probably the most impressionable on Horkheimer's philosophical pessimism. One source was the World War II's legacy of destruction, human and animal suffering, and of importance for this study, the impact it must have had on the environment.

At the basis of this disillusionment, were the present crises in current philosophical thinking – a

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[17] Horkheimer, M. "The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research", in Horkheimer, M. *Between Philosophy and Social Science. Selected Early Writings*, p.1.
[18] *Ibid*., pp.6-7.
[19] *Ibid*., p.8.
[20] *Ibid*., p.11.
[21] *Ibid*., p.13.
[22] *Ibid*., pp.13-14.
[23] Lohmann, J. "The Failure of Self-Realization: An Interpretation of Horkheimer's *Eclipse of Reason*", in Benhabid, S., W. Bonß, and J. McCole (eds). *On Max Horkheimer. New Perspectives*, p.388.

theme one finds in almost all of Horkheimer's writings.[24] Philosophy, or more correctly, social philosophy, was unable to provide answers to conditions of contemporary society. At the centre of its shortcomings, was reason's inability to explain societal contradictions. If reason - man's highest faculty - that was supposed to take us to a new (higher) level of civilization, was mainly responsible for our continued irrational reasoning (and behaviour), then it is not surprising that society is falling back onto new forms of barbarism. In view of this dilemma, Horkheimer offered a different approach for an analysis of society. Whereas other approaches largely tended to explain the social and economic conditions of a pitiful life, Horkheimer instead, wanted to inquire about the status of the concept of rationality in order to establish if it did not suffer from latent deficiencies. Understandably, Horkheimer took the historical context for doing so, and the sacrifices made in World War II for the attainment of co-called better humanity, as his empirical base.

One form of barbarism was of course Nazism. The defeat thereof in the mid-1940s was supposed to be in the interest of future humanity – or so, the rationality of the day, wanted us to believe. Of course, for Horkheimer, this was tantamount to false-consciousness since despite the world's victory over Nazism, we cannot claim a higher level of progress – at least, not until now. In other words, increased human rationality and the technological developments that stem *from* a higher level of civilization *for* a higher level of civilization did not result in a more humane world – WW II was testimony thereto. Thus, Horkheimer argues, our reason has failed us. In fact, he continued, hope for a future humanity is still far off. Why? Because the weakened position of the individual in society, especially against the background of authoritarian rule and exploitative conditions of the modern industrial culture, are proof of a current crises in society. Secondly (and not independently from the former), mass manipulation at the hands of e.g. Nazi propaganda and practices, threaten the existence of future free individuals. Thirdly, the power of imagination, and lastly, independent human judgement has disappeared. In conclusion, reason, man's faculty that was supposed to lead us to a higher order, was itself responsible for threatening the very idea (existence) of man.[25] In other words, current rationalization has erased "that very substance or reason in the name of which this progress is espoused."[26]

3. Mid-1940s philosophical outlook

The writings about the crises in science and society (as we have seen above), date back to Horkheimer's discussions thereof in his inaugural lecture, and a year later, we find the same theme

[24] See for instance Horkheimer, M. *Dawn* & *Decline*, pp.20, 24, 25, 45, 50, 111; Horkheimer, M. "Beginnings of the Bourgeois Philosophy of History", in Horkheimer, M. *Between Philosophy and Social Science. Selected Early Writings*, pp313-388; Horkheimer, M. "The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research", in Horkheimer, M. *Between Philosophy and Social Science. Selected Early Writings*, pp.1-14; Horkheimer, M. "Remarks of Philosophical Anthropology", in Horkheimer, M. *Between Philosophy and Social Science. Selected Early Writings*, pp.151-175; Horkheimer, M. "The Rationalism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy", in Horkheimer, M. *Between Philosophy and Social Science. Selected Early Writings*, p.217-264; Horkheimer, M. "Notes on Science and the Crisis", in Horkheimer, M. *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*, pp.3-9; Horkheimer, M. "The Social Function of Philosophy", in Horkheimer, M. *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*, pp 253-272; Horkheimer, M. and Adorno, T. W. *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, pp.1-34.

[25] Horkheimer, M. *Eclipse of Reason*, p.(v).

[26] *Ibid*., p.(vi).

in "Notes on Science and the Crisis."[27] To belabour this point any further, would result in taking our discussion too far away from our immediate focus.

The materialist contradictions (dialectics) inherent in Horkheimer's argument that he wanted to address in "The Revolt of Nature," started with his philosophical view that the idea of human reason - allegedly, still considered as man's highest intellectual faculty,[28] continued to rule supreme in some corners of present-day traditional theory.[29] Instead, argued Horkheimer, from the mid-1920s onwards, Critical Theory critiqued the misplaced optimistic views of traditional theory. Horkheimer's intention was "to explain why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism"[30] - in other words, how is regression into new forms of barbarism possible when we still continue to rely so much on our highly acclaimed human rationality? In this debate, our environment, or non-human "nature," as it was called then, would not escape his views about the shortcomings of reason and the subsequent crises in science *and* society.

Since human progress and reason were regarded as the flip sides of the same coin, we were led to believe that humankind would be reaching a higher state of existence – that is, if one accepts the theory of so-called historical stages of economic development,[31] together with the later views popularized by the *dependistas* in their dependency theory with regards to the development of underdevelopment.[32] Instead, claimed Critical Theory, reason seemed incapable to deliver on the ultimate aims in life[33] - e.g. the eradication of poverty; freedom from all forms of domination, and achievement of a sustainable development (and uses) of the natural environment.

In the absence of the above three goals, one still finds the perpetuation of rationalized irrationality in human civilization in our time.[34] At best, our rational attempts remain in the dark corners of previous anti-metaphysical positivist approaches of the 19th and 20th centuries.[35] To this day, we have been unable to "unshackle its [positivist's] seeming opposite, independent thought"[36] and thus we continue to be confined to the boundaries of modern traditional philosophy.[37]

The reality is that from the beginning of time, humankind shared its fate with the limited natural environment and the ever-depleting resources thereof that we continue to extract from our planet for our daily livelihood that we share with other creatures. In this context, at least two concepts become significant: the first is *enlightenment*, and the second, is its opposite, *domination.* Caught between the two, is the "modern" industrial society which claims that it is progressing to a higher state of

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[27] See Horkheimer, M. *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*, pp.3-9.

[28] Horkheimer, M. *Eclipse of Reason*, pp.71-72.

[29] See for instance Horkheimer, M. "Beginnings of the Bourgeois Philosophy of History", in Horkheimer, M. *Between Philosophy and Social Science. Selected Early Writings*, pp.313-388; Horkheimer, M. "The Rationalism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy", in Horkheimer, M. *Between Philosophy and Social Science. Selected Early Writings*, pp.217-264; Horkheimer, M. *"Traditional and Critical Theory",* in Horkheimer, M. *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*, pp.188-243; Horkheimer, M. *Eclipse of Reason.*

[30] Horkheimer, M. and T. W. Adorno. "Preface (1944 and 1947)", in Horkheimer, M. and T. W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, p.(xiv).

[31] Lenin, V. I. *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, pp.3-10.

[32] See for instance Frank, A. G. *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America.* For a discussion about the various stages of capitalism, see Pirenne, H. *The Stages in the Social History of Capitalism.*

[33] Horkheimer, M. and T. W. Adorno. "Preface (1944 and 1947)", in Horkheimer, M. and T. W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, pp.(xiv-xix).

[34] Horkheimer, M. *Eclipse of Reason*, p.65.

[35] *Ibid*., p.84.

[36] *Ibid*., p.86.

[37] Practical everyday life in post-apartheid South Africa confirms our sad state of affairs: we cannot solve the simplest of modern problems of workplace disagreements. The net result was that thirty-four protestors were killed by police during the Lonmin miners' strike in Marikana on 16 August 2012.

existence – alleged progress to a so-called emancipated life. Such perceived emancipated state, supersedes the traditional views of psychological and social domains – that is, the cultural situation of the present day. Instead, the domination of nature by man, becomes, wrote Horkheimer, "internalized" since human happiness, wealth, etc., are confined to the "favourable conditions" for its "functional potentiality."[38] The real issue then, becomes the pronounced irrationality in society. Current society and its institutions, reflect the reality of irrationality.[39] According to Honneth, one example of this irrationalism is the conviction that increasing material abundance is sufficient grounds for the continued appropriation of nature[40] - without due consideration to the future unsustainability of our exploitive practices.

In practical terms for Horkheimer, modern insensitivity of humankind towards nature[41] has been present in the domineering human civilization since Biblical times.[42] Already then, the result was the differentiation between man himself, and the physical nature – the latter is subject to the human ego that ultimately transformed industrialist society[43] into confronting and collective forces[44] of material production. For the sake of our survival, mankind transforms him/herself along the lines of self-preservation. In order to do so, we adjust civic society through rationalization, planning[45] and the acquiring of greater technological capacities. To this day (Horkheimer argued), the latter were mere tools in the process of domination[46] whilst, paradoxically argued, it was supposed to enhance humankind's increased freedom[47] from all forms of domination.

But the illusion of freedom from all domination is sandwiched between two positions: firstly, the rise or modern mass society and the loss of the individual therein, and secondly, (dialectically speaking) the apparent greater freedom and domination over nature that handcuffs mankind with his own intellectual chains, are sufficient reason for such concerns. This means that humankind has actually surrendered himself to economic, social and political institutionalized compliance[48] at the expense of human exploitation of nature. This domination of man over nature, also gave rise to the domination of man over his fellows.

Domination then, stems from our human ego which is based on its relation of the domination of nature, the command of others, and the organization of society at large. The ego's aims are its "own indefinite persistence"[49] and the entire universe then becomes a tool of the ego – already deemed unreasonable. This unreasonableness finds concrete existence in the relationship between the ego and nature in the form of tyranny or domination. Both influence how humans view each other – master/slave for instance. It highlights the structure of society as well as real aspects (opportunities) of (for) exploitation.[50] The only way in which this differentiation between man and nature can be overcome, is through a new kind of independent thought.[51]

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[38] Horkheimer, M. *Eclipse of Reason*, p.64.
[39] *Ibid*.
[40] Honneth, A. " Max Horkheimer and the Sociological Deficit of Critical Theory", in Benhabid, S., W. Bonß, and J. McCole (eds). *On Horkheimer. New Perspectives*, p.197.
[41] Horkheimer, M. *Eclipse of Reason*, p.71.
[42] *Ibid*., p.75.
[43] *Ibid*.
[44] *Ibid*.
[45] *Ibid*., p.65.
[46] *Ibid*., p.66.
[47] *Ibid*., p.67.
[48] *Ibid*., p.69.
[49] *Ibid*., pp.72-73.
[50] *Ibid*., p.74.
[51] *Ibid*., pp.75, 86.

But naturally, not everyone will agree with Horkheimer. Whilst he alluded to Critical Theory[52] to do so, others such as Maxwell proposed "a radical change in the fundamental, overall intellectual aims and methods of inquiry. At present, inquiry is primarily devoted to the enhancement of knowledge. This needs to be transformed into a kind of rational inquiry having as its basic aim to enhance personal and social wisdom."[53]

4. Some proposed relevance for the Kowie region

Based on the above, a few obvious pointers regarding the influence of domination (and resistance) as a world-historical force on the environmental history of the Kowie, will have to suffice as suggestions for future re-search and open society[54] debate. Such debate, we argue, goes further than the mere establishment of the facts of the matter[55] - such is in any case, not smart historical practice in any terms.

As background to our discussion, there still remains Marx's treatment of the instruments of production. Of importance here is the notion that nature (e.g. land, water, etc.) are natural instruments of production to which humankind is subservient to. For instance, nature bonds individuals into families. These relations are based on material exchange – not only exchange between individuals, but also exchange between man and nature. Material accumulation and exchange leads to the formation and separation of towns from the countryside because of the contradiction between private property and labour. Accordingly, argued Christopher Görg, the idea that nature is something different from societal[56] relationships and thus from human history, seems to be outdated." In line with Denham's thinking,[57] one can truly consider the socio-economic conditions relevant for human mastery and domination over the non-human environment that perpetuates exploitive relationship. The non-human environment is no longer "mere stuff to be dominated"[58] but rather "an agent in its own right"[59] – hence the term environmental (in)justice.

Critical Theory's relevance for the study of environmental history of the Kowie is present, amongst other arguments, in at least three paradoxes that pertain to ecologies that are currently under stress. Cryptically, we re-state these paradoxes of Biro as follows: firstly, the paradox of mankind's continued unlimited power over nature – including, but not limited to, his reason. Simultaneously, is humankind's increased vulnerability, despite increased dependence on the faculty of reason. The second paradox refers to the uneven, multi-layerdness of human society. The structure of unevenness of societies and the uneven geographical spread thereof, give rise to continued uneven allocation of

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[52] Horkheimer, M. "Traditional and Critical Theory", in Horkheimer, M. *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*, pp.188-243.

[53] Maxwell, N. *From Knowledge to Wisdom. A Revolution in the Aims and Methods of Science*, p.(v).

[54] Popper, K. R. *The Open Society and its Enemies*.

[55] See for instance Engelbrecht, C. "Limitations in History. Part I. Problems with Historical Facts", in *Toposcope,* Vol. XLI, 2010, pp.40-52.

[56] See Görg, C. "Social Relationships with Nature: A Dialectical Approach to Environmental Politics", in Biro, A. (ed). *Critical Ecologies. The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, chapter 2.

[57] Denham, H. "The Cunning of Unreason and Nature's Revolt: Max Horkheimer and William Leiss on the Domination of Nature", in *Environment and History*. Vol. 3, No. 2. "Ecological Visionaries/Ecologised Visions." (Special issue). June 1997, p.149.

[58] Horkheimer, M. *Eclipse of Reason*, p.67.

[59] Denham, H. "The Cunning of Unreason and Nature's Revolt: Max Horkheimer and William Leiss on the Domination of Nature", in *Environment and History*. Vol. 3, No. 2. "Ecological Visionaries/Ecologised Visions." (Special issue). June 1997, p.149.

scare resources and needs investigation. Lastly, it remains paradoxical that despite the increased widespread public realization about environmental un-sustainability, environmentalism as a movement seems unable to mobilize civic society on a widespread scale.[60] In other words, the figment that popular participation is a necessary presumption of corporate environmental exploitation, and that the politics of confrontation is employed to expose corporate environmental injustice, seems in need of re-evaluation.

Previously (and in order to facilitate further debate), arguments were presented to place aspects of local Eastern Cape history in a wider (and to some extent new) research context.[61] The unashamed political interests of nation building (or the new social engineering efforts of reconstructing society on the so-called principles of demographic representativeness) aside, historical research remains a priority for institutions of collective memory preservation and promotion – more so in smaller communities. Whilst it is logic that the business of, for instance, any museum is to exhibit representative representations of the human past, there can be no doubt that research and publication opportunities constitute an integral part of the dissemination of historical knowledge – cultural and environmental alike. Clearly, such should be accompanied by lectures, symposia, seminars and discussion groups in the public domain.

For instance, new research about the construction of the Kowie harbour in the mid-19th century in its relation to the current environment is required. The basis therefor is already inherent in *Basket Work Harbour*[62] - certainly against the background of mankind's domination (exploitation) of nature. Secondly, the result of The Hundred Years War and the military practices employed therein, can be fruitfully commissioned against the enlightenment theme of Critical Theory. The quantification of the loss of life (not only human) is one challenge that can be gainfully explored. In addition, the impact of urban white settlement along the East and West Kleinemonde estuaries would make interesting reading for the wider public. All stakeholders would benefit from research results. Untapped scientific published sources are available for a study of this nature. Furthermore, and in line with recent research published on the Alexandra township in Johannesburg,[63] similar work can be undertaken (and is much needed) to write the history of the relationship between development needs and environmental realities of e.g. Nkwenkwezi township situated on the outskirts of Port Alfred. In this regards, development theory as an explanatory model would benefit research along these lines. Not only would such research project contribute to the political aims of the ANC, but more importantly, would empower all historians to come forward and write their own interesting and deserving local history. Lastly, a similar argument can be made for the role and influence of the local tourist industry in relation to development themes and its impact on the natural environment. One can then "measure" how enlightened we really are and address the current tendency to "chuck one man's history out for that of another" under the false pretence of demographic representativeness. The encouraging undertaking to expand e.g. on Xhosa heritage, is a constructive way forward and an example of

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[60] See for instance Biro, A. (ed). *Critical Ecologies. The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises* chapter 1.

[61] See for instance Engelbrecht, C. "Marx's Theory of Colonisation and Contemporary Eastern Cape (South Africa) Historiography", in <http://independent.academia.edu.christoengelbrecht/Papers1755482>, pp.1-17; Engelbrecht, C. "Traditional and Critical Theory – Any Relevance for Aspects of Eastern Cape (South Africa) History?'', in <http://www.jakobgaardstolten.dk/guest/laia>, pp.1-14; Engelbrecht, C. "Globalization Theory and Reference to Aspects of Eastern Cape (South Africa) History", in <http:www.jakobgaardstoltenresearch.dk/guest/laia.thm>, pp.1-14; Engelbrecht, C. "Limitations in History. Theory and Eastern Cape Historical Research", in <http://independent.academia.edu.christoengelbrecht/>

[62] Turpin, E. W. 1964. *Basket Work Harbour. The Story of the Kowie*.

[63] See this interesting book by Bonner, P. and N. Nieftagodien (eds). *Alexandra. A History.*

enlightened thinking.[64] The reverse however, in our view, would be tantamount to the eclipse of reason.

One must also be mindful of Leiss's recent observation that the flexible use of the term domination harbours pitfalls, since primitive societies (or even pre-modern civilizations) hardly dominated nature – for them, nature was their fate.[65] In a sense, the same holds true for Vogel's concerns about the traditional conceptions of domination over nature and humankind's perceived alienation therefrom. Since we are part of nature and can thus not be alienated from part of ourselves, neither can we dominate part of ourselves, it seems rather logic that we can only be alienated from, and dominate our own-made *environment*,[66] at best. Vogel's influential distinctions between traditional and new forms of critique that relate to humankind and his non-human world, will have far reaching consequences for future debate.

5. Conclusion

When Marx wrote that we know only one science, namely the science of history, and that it can be divided into history of nature and history of mankind, he set in motion a distinction in (and for) social sciences that would form the foundations of debate to this very day. His further observation that the "two sides are, however, inseparable; the history of nature and the history of men are dependent on each other so long as men exist,"[67] is today as pertinent for environmental concerns as when he wrote it in the mid-19th century. The same point can be made about Frank Jacob's compelling views concerning the comparative historical method to study history.[68] Although his argument was based on the relevance of the historical comparative method for global history, comparative environmental historical research with regards to different e.g. estuaries in the Eastern Cape (and on a national scale), would most likely yield stimulating results for further investigation. Local historical societies and publications do not stand independent thereto and can play a positive role in supporting such research and would make valuable contributions to the opening up of new research themes and the dissemination of research findings.

Historians have been researching and writing about humankind's relationship and impact on the environment, from early times. Horkheimer's philosophical views are relevant for environmental history because Critical Theory has practical intent – it is not "something up in the air" or abstract. Consider for instance Lohmann's reminder about Horkheimer's critique of contemporary conceptions of reason: the rational, being defined as whatever is useful and a means to an end, where ends are considered the subject's interest as long as it represents a relation to self-preservation.[69] Today, environmental history is distinctly interdisciplinary in nature – Horkheimer propagated interdisciplinary research almost a century ago.

From its beginning (to this day), Critical Theory's explanations were grounded in the social and cultural conditions of the day. On the one hand, human reason serves as an instrument of the conceptual, but on the other, also serves as a basis for practical forms of domination. This applies

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[64] Houzet, J. "Kowie Museum Seeks to be More Representative", in <http://peherald.com/blog/Talk-of-the-Town/>, 3 Aug 2012.

[65] Leiss, W. "Modern Science, Enlightenment, and the Domination of Nature: No Exit?", in Biro, A. (ed). *Critical Ecologies. The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, chapter 1.

[66] See Vogel, S. "On Nature and Alienation", in Biro, A. (ed). *Critical Ecologies. The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, chapter 7.

[67] Marx, K. (with F. Engels). *The German Ideology,* p.34.

[68] See Jacob, F. "The Historical Comparison as a Method to Write Global History", in <www.academia.edu/2186033/The_Historical_Comparison_as_a_Method_to_Write_Global_History>, 2012.

[69] Lohman, L. "The Failure of Self-Realization: An Interpretation of Horkheimer's *Eclipse of Reason*", in Benhabid, S., W. Bonß, and J. McCole (eds). *On Horkheimer. New Perspectives*, p.388.

equally to the human, animal and physical worlds.[70] The idea of "a technological rationality" as a new form of domination[71] is clearly relevant for environmental history. It raises issues pertaining to moral crises and ties up relations between environmental (in)justice and the practices in (and of) deliberative democracy. The empirical and interdisciplinary nature of the research proposed, intersects between enviro-economical, socio-political and philosophical issues. Because Critical Theory rejects all forms of domination, it is normative in nature and would be useful to debate the increased ANCification of post-apartheid South African society. In the true spirit of Critical Theory, where an enlightened state should have been reached, our so-called enlightenment turned against itself as a form of domination[72] – of man over his fellows and over the environment.[73] For Seyla Benhabid, postmodern critique turns on "[w]hat is justice if not the rational exercise of power?"[74] Almost two decades ago, Axel Honneth made two observations in this respect: firstly, man's acts of instrumental domination through which he learns to dominate nature are followed by his inabilities to control his desires. Secondly, from this follows the weakening of his "sensible capacities." His entire civilizing process constitutes a social pathology.[75] In real life, it goes further than a mere "reflective turn of theory"[76] and raises questions about current ANC-dogmatism that requires a number of modifications in post-apartheid governance in relation to environmental justice. Various forms of neo-barbarism underscore environmental exploitation – also in the Kowie. In line with a view of Martin Jay[77] (although in a different context), one can truly ask if environmental domination in the South African context, can be seen as an obstacle to class struggle.

Critical Theory's specific content changes with new historical circumstances, and therefore is only one reason why histories are constantly re-written – often within the same generation. The second is of course, as a result of the almost instantaneousness of new information on a global scale. The same is relevant for the greater Kowie's environmental history. Our post-1994 historical circumstances, one can argue, have changed sufficiently to justify additional research. However, it does not rule out circumstances of historical continuity. Therefore, our postmodern (still) capitalistic age confirms present day diagnosis of a class struggle that is long not over in South Africa – not for those in favour of ecological sustainability,[78] nor for those who do not care about such but who are simply seeking the most basic of human rights – e.g. service delivery. Such basic rights are, after all, an elementary criterion of civilization and the lack thereof has serious environmental consequences. It is also questionable if class interpretation as an explanatory model, suffices to clarify neo-power relations in current (also often called "New") South Africa. When these issues are grouped together, they present a fertile ground for future research.

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[70] Forst, R. "Justice, Reason, and Critique: Basic Concepts of Critical Theory", in Rasmussen, D. M. (ed). *The Handbook of Critical Theory*, p.150.

[71] Bottomore, T. *The Frankfurt School*, p.23.

[72] Rasmussen, D. M. "Critical Theory and Philosophy", in Rasmussen, D. M. (ed). *The Handbook of Critical Theory*, p.23.

[73] Whitebrook, J. "Fantasy and Critique: Some Thoughts on Freud and the Frankfurt School", in Rasmussen, D. M. (ed). *The Handbook of Critical Theory*, p.288.

[74] Benhabib, S. "Critical Theory and Postmodernism: On the Interplay of Ethics, Aesthetics and Utopia in Critical Theory", in Rasmussen, D. M. (ed). *The Handbook of Critical Theory*, p.230.

[75] Honneth, A. "Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy", in Rasmussen, D. M. (ed). *The Handbook of Critical Theory*, p.383.

[76] Menke, C. "Critical Theory and Tragic Knowledge", in Rasmussen, D. M. (ed). *The Handbook of Critical Theory*, p.60.

[77] Jay, M. "Mass Culture and Aesthetic Redemption: The Debate between Max Horkheimer and Siegfried Kracauer", in Benhabid, S., W. Bonß, and J. McCole (eds). *On Horkheimer. New Perspectives*, p.365.

[78] See for instance Biro, A. "Introduction: The Paradoxes of Contemporary Environmental Crises and the Redemption of the Hopes of the Past", in Biro, A. (ed). *Critical Ecologies. The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises*, chapter 1.

Contemporary structural social transformations in many communities in South Africa are still a highly contradictory process. It has been argued on the one hand, that one can identify noticeable moral, legal and material progress at the hand of institutional changes. For instance, the decision to enlarge on Xhosa history thorough the Kowie History Museum is one such example. In such circumstance, Honneth's concepts of e.g. "reflective modernization" and "knowledge society"[79] are useful tools for further analyses of the South African social fibre and the impact therefore on the environment. Whilst such can be considered as the result of increased human freedom, and movements away from domination, they have also been accompanied by socio-economic developments that have either made it structurally increasingly more difficult for other sections of the population to take advantage of opportunities - thus changing their circumstances to the opposite.

Following Denham, a few points can be made in this respect. Domination, in our view, is the reverse of enlightenment and the unsustainability of current exploitive practices that need a mind-set or attitudinal change to step in line with enlightened *praxis.* This then means that the threats posed to the biotic environments by humans, are no longer neutral (value free) but normative. The non-human environment is thus not merely seen as a technocratic sphere, and so, the ideal of nature has changed away from something to be mastered for our own sake – or for the exploitive sake of humans. This introduces a new concept: that of future mastery. The current and future methods of production *vis a viz* mastery/domination, takes away the subjugation of nature without any meaningful reason. The revolt, as a result of repressive and oppressive conditions in society, stems from the very societal contradictions. Finally, for Denham, change in the social system is required,[80] but for Maxwell we need "a radical change in the fundamental, overall intellectual aims and methods of inquiry. At present inquiry is devoted to the enhancement of knowledge. This needs to be transformed into a kind or rational inquiry having at its basic aim to enhance personal and social *wisdom*."[81]

The memory of South Africa's own imperial history perpetuates aspects of coloniality. This creates a socio-political historical situation on the one hand but also instils the production of knowledge in domestic South Africa and its inter-regional connectivities, on the other. In an attempt, therefore, to promote environmental history research of e.g. the Kowie, various stakeholders need to play a positive role: from local museums,[82] historical organisations, heritage interest groups, political life, private business, and the media – including digital social media. The reality is that these resources are in fact available and collaborative effort could make new research outcomes possible for the collective good of all South Africans. Needless to say, such undertakings would also enhance our participation and understanding of the theory/practice foundations of Critical Theory.

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[79] Honneth, A. "Paradoxes of Capitalist Modernization. The Foundations of a Comprehensive Research Project of the Institute for Social Research", in <http://www.ifs.uni-frankfurt.de/english/pardaox/>.

[80] Denham, H. "The Cunning of Unreason and Nature's Revolt: Max Horkheimer and William Leiss on the Domination of Nature", in *Environment and History.* Vol. 3, No. 2. "Ecological Visionaries/Ecologised Visions." (Special issue). June 1997, pp.149-150; 157-161.

[81] Maxwell, N. *From Knowledge to Wisdom. A Revolution in the Aims and Methods of Science*, p.(v).

[82] Wilmot, B. C. "Some Thoughts on the Establishment of a Museum in Port Alfred", in *Toposcope*, Vol. XII, 1981, pp.3-8.

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